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THE TEACHING OF JESUS.

IV. HIS TEACHING CONCERNING HIMSELF.

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Jesus' claim to be the true Messiah—contrast between the popular and the true Messianic ideas.—His self-designation, the Son of Man—its origin and definition.—Professor Bruce.—Jesus the Son of God—its meaning as gathered from the synoptists and from the fourth Gospel.

For our present purpose we are to take into view, not the whole New Testament teaching concerning the person of Christ, nor even all that the Gospels teach concerning him, but only the most important claims which he explicitly made for himself. We can best group the subject-matter of our study under the three titles which are most significant in their bearing upon the nature of his person and work.

1. Jesus claimed to be the true *Messiah* of the Jewish people. The Old Testament was full of the expectation of a coming Deliverer. This idea deeply penetrated the life and powerfully influenced the history of the people. Israel has been called "an incarnate hope." Of this hope Jesus claimed to be the fulfilment. But Jesus did not fulfil the Messianic hope of the Jews in the way in which *they* had expected. In consequence, in part, of the decline of spiritual religion in the later Judaism, and, in part, of the hardships and oppressions which the people had suffered, they had come to think of the Messiah as a victorious king, a second David, who should throw off the Roman yoke and build up the nation in power and splendor. Their idea of the Messiah had become worldly and political. When Jesus came, claiming to be the Messiah, it was not strange that the people said: He shows no sign of doing what we expect the Messiah to do; he even disclaims any intention to triumph and reign over our enemies; he cannot be our Messiah.

His standard of the Messianic work and theirs were fundamentally different. It is probable that the chief significance of his temptation at the beginning of his ministry lay in the fact that there was presented to him a worldly and selfish way of accomplishing his Messianic career. He was tempted to forsake the path of humility and suffering; to use his miraculous power for his personal gratification; to lower his claims to the level of the sign-seeking Jews, and to seek the applause of men by the achievement of outward, temporal dominion. This temptation Jesus resisted. It involved the crisis of his life-work. He adhered with absolute devotion to the spiritual conception of his mission and kingdom. Thus at the beginning of his ministry he saw two paths before him, the path of ambition which led to popularity and to immediate, outward success, and the path of sacrifice which led to the cross; but Jesus knew that this latter path led by way of the cross to the true glory and crown of obedience to God, and to the true victory and kingship over the world.

The contrast between the popular and the true Messianic ideas which we have just noticed, throws light upon the singular reserve with which Jesus announced his Messiahship. On various occasions, when his miracles were likely to create a popular excitement, he said to his disciples: "Tell no one." He shrank from undue publicity and dreaded to be thought of by the people as a mere doer of wonders, lest superficial conceptions of his person and work should be encouraged. He wished rather to draw men's minds to his spiritual truth and kingdom. He wished men to believe on him "for the very works' sake" if they could believe on him for no better reason, but he greatly preferred to win men by what he said and was.

He did, however, upon occasion, claim to be the Messiah, or Christ. He never refused the title when it was applied to him by others. To Peter's famous confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), he explicitly assented; to the blind man's salutation: "Thou son of David" (Mark 10:47), he responded, and when asked by Pilate if he was "the King of the Jews," he answered in the affirmative (Mark 15:2).

The questions, What were the stages in the development of

Jesus' Messianic consciousness? and, What were the steps in the actual recognition of his Messiahship by his disciples? involve difficult critical problems which cannot be discussed here. We may, however, note that the baptism of Jesus, Peter's great confession at Cæsarea Philippi, and his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, mark the three principal stages which we are able to trace both in the proclamation and in the recognition of his Messiahship.

2. The favorite title by which Jesus referred to himself was *the Son of Man*. What characteristics and functions Jesus meant to include in this designation is a very difficult question. The term does not seem to have been in current use at the time as a name for the Messiah, and many have thought that Jesus purposely chose an uncommon title as a kind of incognito. The phrase is found in the Old Testament designating man in his weakness and frailty, in contrast to God, as in Ps. 8:4: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" In this sense it is especially common in Ezekiel. It is, however, found in one Messianic passage in the Book of Daniel (7:13, 14). After the description of the world-kings, there appears to the prophet's vision "one like unto a son of man: And there was given unto him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." It has been common to suppose that Jesus' use of the title stood connected with this striking passage. But this is very uncertain in view of the fact that the Messiah is not here called the Son of Man, but is only described as like to a son of man, *manlike*, in contrast to the heads of the world-kings who are symbolically described as *beasts*. We can, therefore, derive no clear and satisfactory explanation of the title, as Jesus used it, from the Old Testament.

The force of the title can be determined only by a study of its use, but not even thus can any one simple idea be found which represents, in all instances, its natural force. It appears to me that Jesus used the title in a comprehensive sense to designate himself as the type of manhood, as the One who perfectly ful-

filled the divine will in and for humanity. He makes all that is of human interest his care. He is himself the representative man who will do for man, under the conditions and limitations of human life, all the gracious work of love which God designs to do for him. When, for example, Jesus says: "The sabbath was made on man's account, and not man on the sabbath's account;" the sabbath is the means, man is the end, not the reverse he adds: "so that the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath" (Mark 2:27, 28). Since the sabbath concerns *man's* well-being, it falls within the province of *the Son of Man*, the field of whose interest and work is *humanity*.

The terms must be very broad and comprehensive in which the significance of "the Son of Man" shall be defined. As soon as they are narrowed to express some more specific idea, they are found inapplicable in many places. All definitions which find in the term some feature of Jesus' personal character or some single aspect of his work, break down. The term seems rather to include the breadth and universality of the character and work of Jesus. Its definition must cover the field of human needs. As Son of Man, Jesus is humanity at its climax, seeking by divinely appointed means to bring man to his true life and destiny. We, therefore, find that the term more directly denotes, now one, now another aspect of his person and work.

Professor Bruce has indicated three elements of Jesus' person and work which, taken together, would very well represent the import of "Son of Man."¹ (1) It designates him as the man of sorrow and acquainted with grief. The typical text which expresses this idea is: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20). His poverty and humility represent a phase, or condition, of his saving work on man's behalf. As the Son of Man he has voluntarily come down into the lowliest estate in which man himself is found, that he might succor and save him. (2) The title signalizes Jesus as the sympathetic man. As Son of Man his interest in man is as wide as the range of human needs and possibilities. Various aspects of this interest are indicated in such

¹ *The Kingdom of God*, p. 172 sq.

texts as these: "The Son of Man came eating and drinking" (Matt. 11:19), that is, entering sympathetically into man's social life and joys; "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), indicating that the great aim of his mission was to rescue man from the power and consequences of his sin, and to bring him into fellowship of life with God. (3) In contrast to his present poverty and humiliation for man's sake, are depicted his future power and glory when, as Son of Man, he returns for salvation and judgment in the clouds of heaven, accompanied by hosts of angels (Matt. 25:31 *sq.*) Professor Bruce concludes, "It thus appears that the title "Son of Man" expressed the Messianic consciousness of Jesus in three distinct directions. It announced a Messiah appointed to suffer, richly endowed with human sympathy, and destined to pass through suffering to glory."¹ It is difficult, however, to believe that Jesus directly and consciously attached three distinct senses to the title. To me it seems more natural to suppose that these distinguishable elements of the conception met and blended in the thought of Jesus in some comprehensive idea of his mission. I prefer to think that the title "Son of Man" designates him as the One in whose humanity God will realize in and for mankind his gracious will and purpose. To me the term stands for the whole aim and import of the incarnation.

3. Jesus also claimed to be *the Son of God*. He frequently alluded to himself as *the Son* when speaking of his relation to God, and, although he appears but seldom to have used the full title "Son of God," he accepted it when others applied it to him, as when Peter said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16), and as when the high priest said to him: "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63), and Jesus answered affirmatively. In these cases the title "Son of God" is so coupled with the title *Messiah* or *Christ* as to indicate that they are nearly synonymous.

The title "Son of God" is most frequently applied to Jesus by others than himself, and especially by John in the fourth Gos-

¹ *The Kingdom of God*, pp. 176, 177.

pel. It is a much debated question among scholars whether this title is intended merely to designate Jesus as one who stands in perfect harmony and fellowship with God, that is, as the special object of the Father's good pleasure, or whether it describes him as participating in the divine nature,—as essentially, as well as ethically, one with the Father. Some hold that we derive only the ethical conception from the synoptic Gospels, but that the fourth Gospel goes beyond that idea. This general question I have fully discussed elsewhere, with special reference to the fourth Gospel.¹ It is possible here only to indicate briefly the elements and the bearings of the problem.

Perhaps the most important passage in the Synoptics in its bearing upon our question is Matt. 9:27: "No one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither knoweth any the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." I do not see how anyone can deny that this statement makes an altogether unique claim for the Sonship of Jesus. No other "Son of God," in the sense in which the obedient and trustful are frequently spoken of as "Sons of God" in the New Testament, could, without sheer presumption, make such a claim. Jesus affirms here an altogether exceptional relation of intimate knowledge and loving fellowship with God. It may be held that this fact *implies* or *presupposes* a union of nature with God, but it cannot be said that the passage directly *asserts* this. Whether it involves this idea or not will depend largely upon considerations to be drawn from other sources.

Some of the passages from the fourth Gospel in which Jesus most strongly asserts his filial relation to God are the following: "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (3:35). "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is from God, he hath seen the Father" (6:46). "I and the Father are one" (10:30). "I am in the Father, and the Father in me" (14:11). In the prologue of the Gospel (1:14, 18) and in his first epistle (4:9) John prefixes to the word "Son" the term "only-begotten." This word

¹ *The Johannine Theology*, chapters 4 and 5, on "the Doctrine of the Logos" and "the Union of the Son with the Father."

is also applied to Jesus in John 3:16, 18, but it is uncertain whether the verses in which it is used are to be referred to Jesus himself or to the evangelist. The questions concerning the text and interpretation of these verses are too difficult to be discussed in this brief article, and, moreover, they lie outside our immediate purpose, which is to indicate the claims which Jesus is explicitly said to have made for himself.

Jesus asserted that he existed in loving fellowship with the Father before he was born into the world, and, indeed, before the world was created. "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John 8:58). "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self (or, at thy side), with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5). While I do not think that the title "Son of God," as used in the Gospels, is intended directly to describe Jesus as a divine person, that is, as one in essence with God, I think it is so used as to *imply* a pre-temporal and essential union of Jesus with God. This conclusion is derived, however, from combining the teaching concerning the Sonship of Jesus to God with his own assertions of his preëxistence in perfect fellowship with the Father. In treating of the general subject, moreover, the teaching of John concerning Christ as the "only-begotten Son" and as the eternal Word, who "was with God, and was God," contribute most important elements of proof in confirmation of the conclusion just mentioned.